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ABSTRACT

This document, designed for employers in England, provides an overview of further education (FE) opportunities, enrollments, and developments/trends throughout the United Kingdom. Section 1, which is basically an overview of the FE system, examines the following questions: why FE is important; what links exist between employers and FE colleges (training and consultancy, recruitment, voluntary activities); how FE operates (types/numbers of FE colleges, their independence, their funding); and how FE colleges are changing (customers, facilities, methods of study). Destinations of school leavers and employer-led enrollments are examined in section 2. Section 3, which constitutes approximately 50% of the document, explains the following aspects of the system of FE courses and qualifications: the new qualifications framework; qualification pathways; qualification bodies; the National Vocational Qualifications; the General National Vocational Qualifications; A and AS levels; issues for recruitment; and qualifications reform and review. Discussed in section 4 are recent and projected developments in the following areas: national measures to support vocational training; employer-education links; and national targets for education and training. Contains 34 references. (MN)

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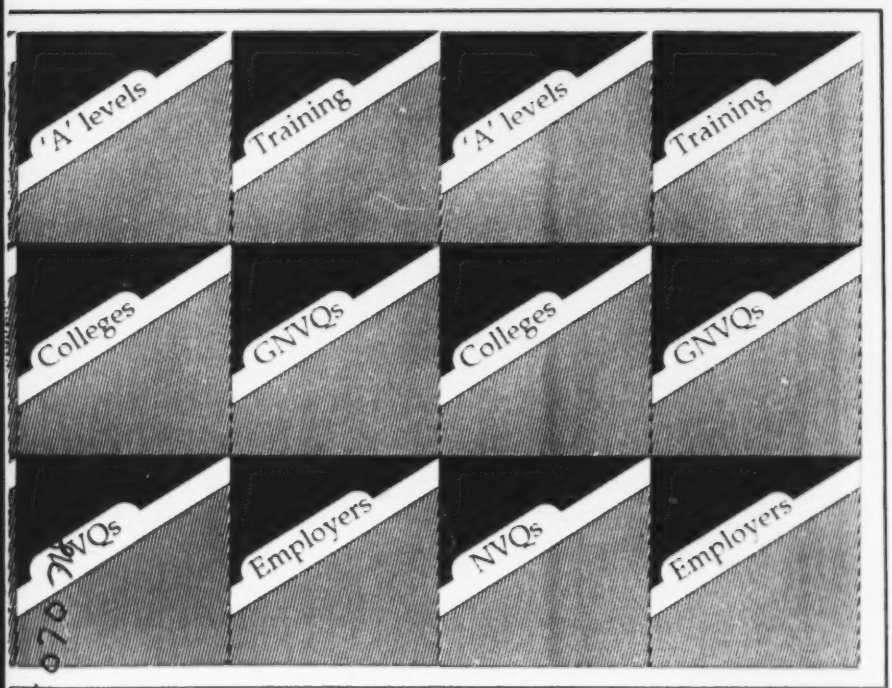

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1. Introduction and Background

This IES brief for employers has been produced under the auspices of the IES Co-operative Research Programme. It aims to provide companies with some key facts, about the Further Education (FE) sector and its increasingly important role in recruitment, training and career development. The brief also outlines the substantial changes that are taking place in the development and delivery of qualifications.

The brief will cover the following areas:

- the range and scope of the FE sector and why it is important
- the changing nature of participation in FE
- changes in qualifications and training
- new government led initiatives which link employers to the FE sector.

1.1 Why is FE important?

FE is important to employers and to the economy as a whole because of its effect on skill levels and vocational training, and, increasingly, on the higher education system. It has about the same amount of funding as the universities but over twice as many enrolments each year. However, by comparison with schools and universities, FE is the least publicly visible sector of education and the least well understood.

There are 456 FE colleges in England (often known as technical colleges) providing almost all education over the age of 16 outside universities and school sixth forms. They had 3.2 million enrolments in 1994/5 and their total government budget for that period was over £2.8 billion. As well as training and educating over 40 per cent of the country's 16 to 17 year olds, more than 300,000 college enrolments were people whose training was supported by employers, and 66 per cent of those were over the age of 19.

As well as commercial and industrial training, about 50 per cent of all 'A' levels are taken in FE colleges. Many colleges offer their own higher education courses, but by 1993 over half were courses for students from local universities on a franchise basis. The colleges also cater for the employed and unemployed, and

full- or part-time students. They have a remit to provide social and recreational education in the local community, and many also work with 14 to 16 year olds in schools.

FE has been called the 'Cinderella' of the education system but is gaining increasing prominence in terms of this country's economic and social development. The 1994 government White Paper[1] devotes one chapter to the importance of education and training to the economy as a whole and singles out FE:

> *'Raising the average level of attainment and greater access to education are vital for competitiveness. In future, the most successful nations will be those which develop high quality, skilled and motivated workforces and make good use of them. The (FE) colleges will play a key part in meeting the needs of employers, young people and adults for high quality general and vocational education and training.'*

1.2 What are the links between employers and FE colleges?

Most FE colleges have day-to-day contact with several hundred employers mainly in their own locality. Many companies use FE directly for training, others are inadvertently influenced by it through the staff they recruit, and many support colleges and students through joint activities and sponsorship. The main links between FE and employers are outlined below.

1.2.1 Training and consultancy

FE colleges provide training for companies' existing employees in (for example) health and safety, foreign languages, marketing, IT updating, and training of workplace trainers. Courses of a few days or a few weeks tailored to a company's specific requirements are becoming more common as day-release training declines in popularity. Courses might now be on the company premises or by distance learning as well as at the colleges' premises.

Many companies use specialist FE college staff as consultants on topics such as training needs analysis, quality management, or Investors in People.

Evening classes are used by employers/employees as well as the general public for work-related or leisure courses (*eg* supervisory studies, word processing, and languages).

1.2.2 Recruitment

Recruitment of staff with vocational qualifications such as BTEC or 'A' levels, direct from FE colleges, is common for many employers. The recruits have usually been 18 year olds, but

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[1] *'Competitiveness. Helping Business to Win'* HMSO, 1994.

colleges are increasingly training many more older people who have returned to study or retraining.

Graduate recruiters need to be aware that most universities have two main types of link with FE colleges. Firstly, the universities have arrangements with colleges to recruit applicants from FE who have achieved vocational qualifications, access courses, or HNC/D, as well as those with 'A' levels. Secondly, many colleges now deliver the first year of a degree course in the college under a franchise arrangement with a university. In 1993/94 there were 42,000 student places franchised to 288 FE colleges by 66 universities and colleges of higher education[1]. These kinds of arrangements have become more popular as universities have increased their overall numbers and need more resources, and as an increasing number of mature and part-time undergraduates prefer to study at a local university.

1.2.3 Voluntary activities

Work experience placements for students, help with projects, sponsorship of prizes, buildings or events, are common ways in which companies help FE students and colleges in their locality. These activities allow a company to raise its profile at the same time as helping individual students and the wider community. College governing bodies and course advisory groups all have employer members. They advise the colleges on planning, courses and qualifications, and thus influence the training of the local workforce. Recent national initiatives set up to increase links between employers and FE are outlined in Section 4 of this report.

1.3 How does FE operate?

1.3.1 The colleges

When we talk about the FE sector, this covers a variety of institutions which are funded by the Funding Councils for England and Wales (FEFCE, FEFCW). In England the FE sector is made up as follows:

- **223 further education colleges.** These offer a large choice of vocational qualifications, *eg* information technology, business administration, engineering, health care, catering and hairdressing. They provide day release and short courses for employees or full-time courses. They also offer 'A' levels/ GCSEs, adult literacy and evening classes. They may coexist with school sixth forms and sixth form colleges in a locality.

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[1] *Funding the Relationship*, HEFCE 1995.

- **114 sixth form colleges** offer 'A' level and GCSE courses within one institution instead of several local school sixth forms. They increasingly offer vocational courses and a few may have adult students.
- **64 tertiary colleges** usually replace school sixth forms or sixth form colleges and provide a single educational institution for everyone over 16 in a locality. They offer 'A' levels/GCSEs and some vocational education as in general FE colleges.
- **32 colleges of agriculture and horticulture** are specialist colleges usually with their own land, farms and nursery gardens *etc.* They provide education and training in an increasingly diverse range of occupations, *eg* horse management, green-keeping, game rearing, landscape gardening.
- **9 colleges of art, design and performing arts** are specialist colleges with the sort of facilities for students to do work-related education and training leading to higher education or employment.
- **14 designated institutions,** *eg* the Cordwainers College, maritime colleges, Ruskin College, provide adult education or highly job-specific training.

The colleges are spread over all regions of England with greater concentrations in large centres of population. Over 85 per cent of students attend the FE and tertiary colleges. These can vary enormously in size from a few hundred enrolments to The Sheffield College, the largest, which had over 42,000 enrolments in 1993/4. This included part-time students, but is still several times more than many universities. College budgets vary from over £28 million in the case of Sheffield which operates on several city sites, to just over £1 million for a small rural sixth form college.

1.3.2 Independence

Further education, tertiary and sixth form colleges in England and Wales assumed ownership of their assets and liabilities on 1st April 1993 and became corporations independent of local education authority (LEA) control. Under statutory regulations, their governing bodies should consist of between ten and 20 members, at least half of which must be business members, including a member of the local Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

The colleges have to provide FEFC and the TECs with strategic plans based on local labour market information, and set targets for student growth. An ongoing programme of FEFC inspection evaluates the colleges' performance, including their responsiveness to employers and the wider community .

1.3.3 Funding

FE colleges now receive most of their funding from the FEFCs for England and Wales. These funds replace the LEA funds and, put simply, are based on the number of students enrolled, the type and content of the course or programme, student retention, and achievement of qualifications.

Colleges are also free to earn or receive income from other sources and the main ones are fees from TECs for training provision (*eg* Training for Work, Youth Training); grants for development projects and initiatives from TECs, the European Social Fund *etc.;* or fees from employers, other institutions and individuals. Other income might come from the letting of premises or employer sponsorship.

FE has always had to be market driven because its funding is mainly dependent on numbers enrolled. Unlike schools, colleges are not part of the compulsory education system — no one is legally obliged to attend them — they have to attract 'customers' (students) and compete with each other, just like any other business.

1.4 How are FE colleges changing?

FE colleges have changed in response to wider economic and social changes. Some detailed examples of this are given in Section 2, but this section looks briefly at the most obvious and visible changes.

1.4.1 Customers

In broad terms, colleges now have fewer craft trade apprentices on day release in mechanical engineering or construction, but more courses in, for example, electrical/electronic engineering, business and IT. There are service sector courses such as catering, hotel and leisure management, and community care. Colleges now offer many more short courses for employees of local companies, plus community-based courses for adult literacy, people with disabilities, English for speakers of other languages and courses to train teachers and trainers. In line with these changes, most FE institutions no longer call themselves technical colleges. Some just use the word college, others call themselves community colleges or colleges of technology.

1.4.2 Facilities

Many colleges now have user-friendly reception and guidance areas for members of the public to get advice about courses, and are continually updating many of their buildings, and much of their equipment to meet industrial and commercial needs. Conference facilities are available in some colleges, as are sports

halls and playing fields. These are used by students but are also hired out to provide additional income.

All colleges have computers for general use and for IT-specific courses, or increasingly have IT/resource centres, sometimes accessed by 'swipe cards', where students can drop in to work on their own. There has also been an increase in the use of satellites and other electronic forms of communication, and college libraries are increasingly places to use multi-media resources as well as books.

For many vocational courses, colleges provide realistic working environments with industrial standard facilities. These include restaurants, cafes, travel agencies, nurseries, hairdressing and beauty salons, staffed by supervised students and open to the public at reduced rates. Others include training offices, health care facilities and workshops for electrical/electronic engineering, computer-aided manufacture, motor vehicle technology, construction, and welding.

1.4.3 Methods of study

FE colleges offer a huge range of qualifications in many vocational and academic subjects. Each college chooses what to offer and constantly updates this in line with customer demand and labour market information. What is also changing is the way in which many of the courses are taught. Colleges now provide a wide range of methods and modes of study in order to offer flexibility for their different types of customers. The most common methods (in addition to full-time courses) are:

- part time, day or evening
- day or block release
- drop-in workshops for information technology, literacy, numeracy *etc.*
- short courses customised for a single employer on the employers' premises
- distance learning using video, learning materials, tapes, TV *etc.*
- flexible starting and assessment times throughout the year.

Many full-time students work as part of their course on day or block release in the community — in commerce and industry, in the media, in homes for the elderly, hotels and restaurants and the health services.

2. Participation in Further Education

The changes in the way colleges are funded and governed have been accompanied by significant changes in the patterns of participation in FE. In the last few years the biggest growth has been in the number of 16 to 18 year olds staying on in full-time education instead of taking up jobs or Youth Training places, but there have also been changes in the age policies of company employees trained by colleges, and changes in the numbers studying certain subjects. The key trends are outlined in this chapter.

2.1 Destinations of school leavers

In 1989 there were just under 629,000 young people eligible to leave school and that number dropped steadily to just under 513,000 in 1993. However, in 1994, it rose by 2.8 per cent to over 526,000 and is set to increase gradually over the next few years.

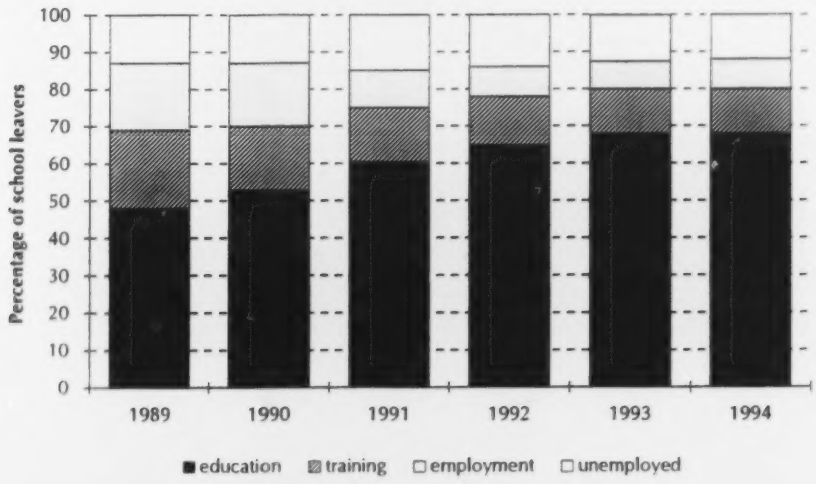
Figure 2.1 shows how the destinations of these school leavers have changed over the past few years. Of the 1994 leavers, 68 per cent stayed on in full-time education compared with 48 per cent in 1989. The numbers taking up Youth Training programmes over the period 1989 to 1994 fell from 21 per cent to 12 per cent, whilst those going directly into jobs had dropped from 18 per cent in 1989 to seven per cent in 1993. The 1994 figures show a slight increase in the number going into employment but it is too early to decide whether or not this is the start of a return to higher youth employment and lower staying-on rates.

2.1.1 Reasons for staying on in education

There is no single straightforward answer to why more young people have been staying on after the compulsory school-leaving age but some of the reasons are outlined below. These include:

- the decline in the number of jobs available to inexperienced and poorly-qualified young people and little or no recruitment of this age group by employers
- a shift in attitude amongst young people, their parents and teacher/advisers towards the desirability of staying on to get further qualifications in order to be more acceptable in the job market

Figure 2.1: Destination of school leavers, England and Wales 1989 to 1994



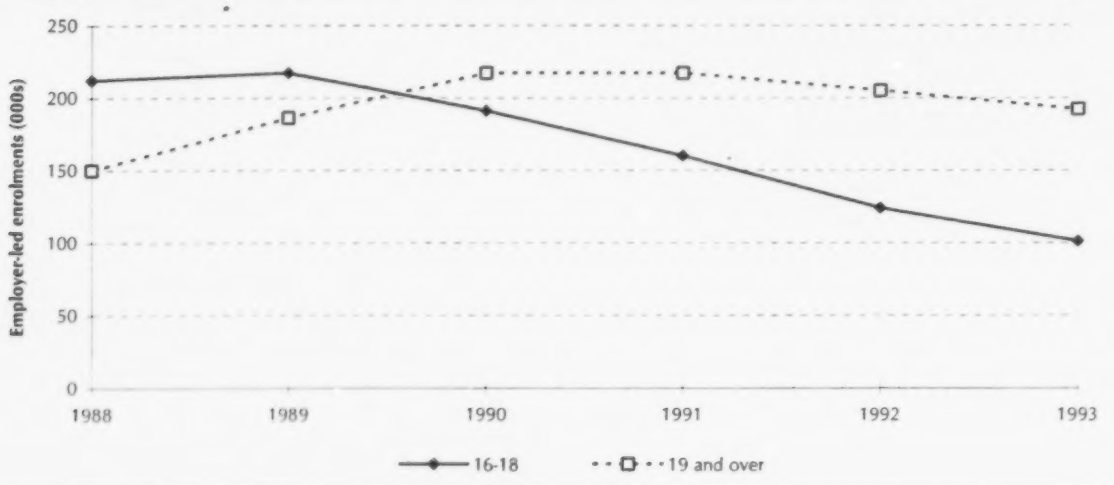
Source: UK Heads of CSA, School Leavers Destinations, 1994

- increasing success in GCSE achievement; research shows that young people who achieve better at a younger age are more likely to stay on and take further qualifications.
- Staying on after the age of 16 is no longer dependent on the number and grades of GCSE passes. Colleges have always had an open access policy to post-16 education although like many schools they may specify GCSE or other achievement levels as entry to certain courses.
- There are many more vocational courses which can be taken instead of 'A' levels or resits of GCSEs. The practical and applied nature of these attracts people who would not have been interested in 'A' levels.
- Increasing numbers of people from FE currently go on to universities with their vocational qualifications such as GNVQ or BTEC National Diploma.
- As all post-16 educational establishments are now funded on the numbers they recruit, they are much more keen to accept students of all levels of ability.

2.1.2 College enrolments

In 1994/95, 76 per cent of all students on FEFC funded courses were adults (over 19) and the overall number of FE college enrolments was 3.2 million. The biggest increase has been in full-time student enrolments, up by 12 per cent between 1992/3 and 1993/4. At the same time, part-time enrolments where employers provide fees or time to study (employer-led), have declined each year since 1988 (Figure 2.2). Independent part-time enrolments (those responsible for their own fees and attending in their own time) were up by two per cent and they continue to be the

Figure 2.2: Employer-led part-time enrolments 1988 to 1993 in FE sector colleges



Source: FEFC, 1995

colleges' largest source of students. Total college enrolments for 1993/4 were made up of:

- full-time courses 20 per cent
- part-time employer-led 14 per cent
- independent part-time 66 per cent.

2.2 Employer-led enrolments

Figure 2.2 shows how employer-led enrolments for 16 to 18 year olds fell dramatically between 1988 and 1993 and those employees aged 19 and over rose over the same period. In 1988 there were 212,000 16 to 18 year olds being sponsored by employers but by 1993 this figure was 101,000[1]. This was due to the demographic downturn in this age group, and the fact that fewer young people entered the workforce. As many colleges had had a heavy commitment to large numbers of day-release apprentices in traditional industries, some have subsequently seen departments close and staff laid off. Others have kept going because of the increase in full-time student numbers.

In 1988, 16 to 18 year olds accounted for 59 per cent of colleges' employer-led enrolments but by 1993 this number had dropped to 34 per cent. The corresponding 66 per cent of the total 292,000 employer-led enrolments in 1993 were aged 19 and over (FEFC, 1995).

A recent study which IES carried out for the FEFC, ED and the CIHE found that employers are still using colleges for training

[1] Unpublished data, FEFC 1995.

but are more likely to be training their older existing employees than new recruits[1]. They increasingly use colleges for short courses such as health and safety training and to train NVQ trainers in the workplace. A further boost to employer-related training could be given by the introduction of Modern Apprenticeships (see Chapter 4) recently launched by the government, although the level of FE involvement is not yet clear.

2.2.3 Sectoral enrolments

The biggest areas of decline in college employer-led enrolments (FEFC, 1995) by sector from 1988 to 1993, perhaps as expected have been:

- construction: down by 49 per cent
- engineering: down by 27 per cent
- agriculture: down by 20 per cent.

These are all industries which have reduced their workforces over this period, but engineering still accounted for colleges' largest number of employer-led college enrolments in 1993 (29 per cent of the total), with business subjects the next most popular at 25 per cent of the total. Employer-led enrolments in science subjects have seen the most dramatic increase, up by 47 per cent from 1988 to 1993 although they still only made up five per cent (18,000 in total) of employer-led enrolments (FEFC, 1995).

It is interesting to note that the number of people employed in banking, finance and business services has more than doubled from 1.3 million to 2.8 million.[2] Nevertheless, employer-led enrolments in FE colleges in business occupations have been declining each year since 1990 (from 93,000 to 1993's provisional figure of 74,000). This could indicate that companies in this sector are training fewer people or that they are using providers other than colleges.

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[1] Rawlinson S, Connor H, *Developing Responsiveness: College–Employer Interaction*, IES Report 300, 1996.

[2] *Competitiveness. Forging Ahead*, HMSO 1995.

3. Courses and Qualifications

3.1 The new qualifications framework

This chapter will briefly explain the new national framework of qualifications. It will give some details about the different types of qualifications which are likely to have an impact on training and recruitment procedures at all levels over the next few years. For reasons of space the systems in Scotland and Northern Ireland have not been included.

For some years there has been a confusing plethora of vocational and academic qualifications offered after the age of 16. It was difficult to compare the different qualifications or decide how to progress from one to another. In 1986 the government set up the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) to establish a framework for vocational qualifications which was coherent and which everyone could use and understand. The framework they established is shown in Figure 3.1.

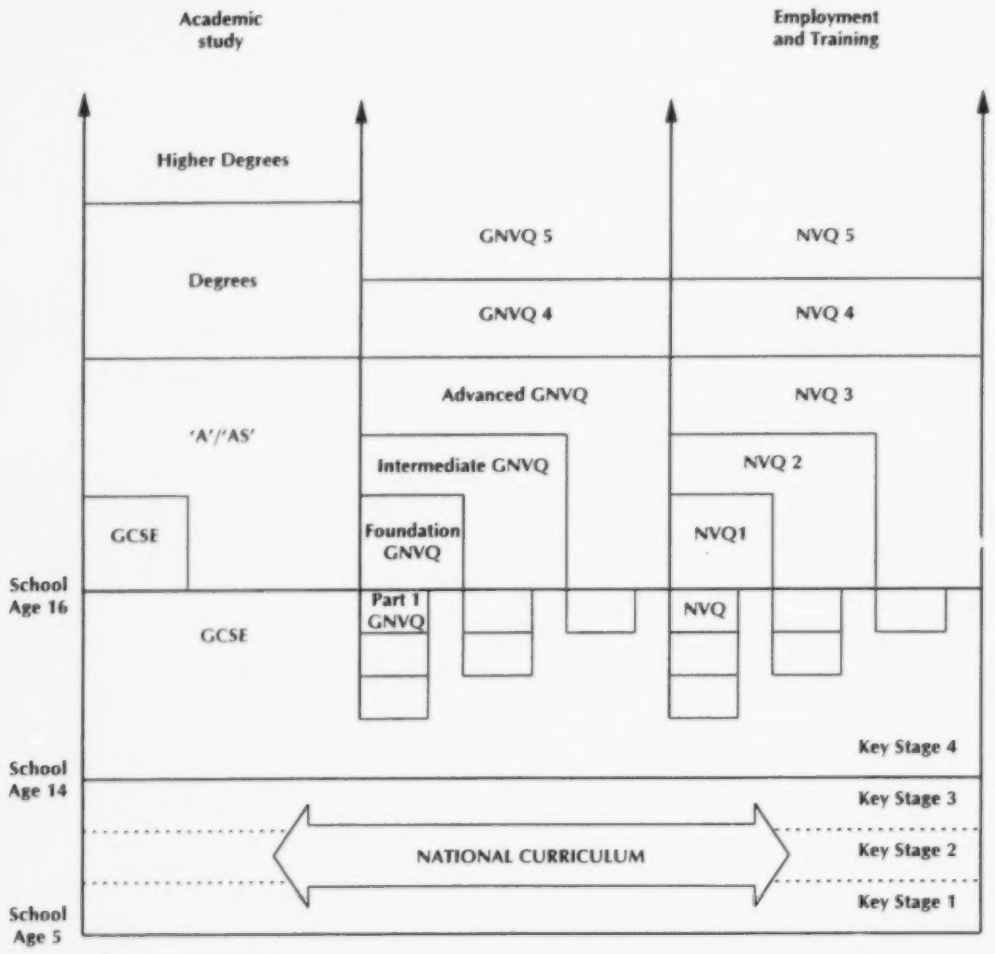
The framework consists of five levels, and shows equivalence and progression routes. To implement the framework, many existing qualifications were changed, and many new ones developed. The chart shows how the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs), now relate to the rest of the education system. More details of NVQ and GNVQ are in Sections 3.4 and 3.5.

3.2 Qualification pathways

In July 1993 the Secretary of State for Education announced that after compulsory schooling there would be 'three qualification pathways'. The vocational qualifications, NVQ and GNVQ, were designed to have parity with the academic qualifications (*ie* 'A' levels, GCSEs and degrees), but would measure different kinds of achievement. The three pathways, which will be explained in more detail later in this section, are:

- NVQs are very job-specific qualifications grouped into 11 occupational areas at five levels of achievement. They are intended to be taken by those already in work, and were first introduced in 1988 and new occupations are being added all the time.

Figure 3.1: Key stage 4 and beyond: National Qualification Framework



Source: NCVQ 1994

- GNVQs, piloted from 1992, provide education and training in broad occupational areas and are now being phased in with eight occupations at three levels so far. Advanced level GNVQ is called Vocational 'A' level. Over 160,000 students are already doing GNVQs and the first Advanced level students came onto the job market in Summer 1994.
- 'A'/'AS' levels and GCSEs which are available in a wide range of subjects can usually be studied full- or part-time. Colleges in the FE sector offer about 50 per cent of 'A' levels and school sixth forms the rest. FE colleges offer the opportunity to re-sit courses and take subjects which may not be available in schools.

Figure 3.2 shows how the different qualifications equate to each other and to job levels. The idea of having new vocational qualifications which are equivalent to traditional ones like 'A' level, but which test very different kinds of knowledge or skills,

Figure 3.2: Employment and qualification equivalents

Approximate employment terms	Vocational Qualifications		Academic Qualifications
	NVQ	GNVQ	
Professional Qualifications Middle Managers	5	–	Higher Education
Higher Technician Junior Managers	4	–	
Technician/supervisor	3	Advanced	2 'A' Levels
Craftsman	2	Intermediate	5 GCSEs (A-C)
Pre-vocational	1	Foundation	4 GCSEs (D-G)

Source: White Paper 'Competitiveness' May 1994

causes some problems for recruitment. To compare them is not to compare like with like, and debate will continue about parity and equivalence. What might be more helpful is to understand some of the main features of each type of qualification in order to be clearer about which are best suited to different purposes at different times. Sections 3.4, 3.5, 3.6 do this.

3.3 Qualification bodies

Before exploring the recent developments in each type of qualification in more detail, it is necessary to explain briefly the role of the different types of bodies involved in the qualifications system.

3.3.1 Awarding bodies

Three of the most well known are the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&GLI), the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC), and the Royal Society of Arts (RSA). GNVQs are offered by these three but there are more than 100 awarding bodies for NVQs; many professions, trades and occupations have their own awarding bodies, *eg* the Chartered Institute of Bankers, the Construction Industry Training Board, and the Institute of Personnel Development (the former IPM and ITD). There are eight different awarding bodies for 'A' levels, *eg* the Joint Matriculation Board (JMB).

Awarding bodies are semi-commercial organisations who devise their own qualifications, and charge a fee for administering assessment procedures/examinations, and issue certificates. They have to approve each 'centre' (*ie* school, college, training provider) which wants to offer a qualification, and they monitor standards and quality in each centre.

3.3.2 NCVQ and SCAA

These are government-funded bodies with a national remit for developing, approving and overseeing all qualifications. They are separate from the awarding bodies but have ultimate responsibility for approving qualifications. NCVQ has responsibility for NVQs and GNVQs, and the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) has roughly the equivalent role for the National Curriculum, GCSEs and 'A' levels.

3.4 National Vocational Qualifications

3.4.1 Background

There are now 500 NVQs in operation covering 150 occupations applicable to more than 80 per cent of jobs. They cover 11 broad occupational areas, and most are available at levels 1 to 3. There are a few at level 4, including Accounting, Purchasing, Information Systems, but so far Management is the only level 5 NVQ available. Over 500,000 people have already achieved NVQs.

NVQs are qualifications which are awarded for achievement and ability related specifically to the workplace, and are designed to be delivered and assessed there. They consist of *occupational standards* derived from functional analysis of a specific job at a specific operational level (see Figure 3.2) for example Accounting, Retailing, and Customer Service. The analysis and subsequent development into a qualification is done by *lead bodies* — groups of employers and their representatives in each occupational sector. Lead bodies have to be recognised by the DfEE (the Department for Education and Employment), and all NVQs have to be approved by NCVQ.

Instead of a syllabus listing the content to be taught, NVQs consist of occupational standards which list the skills and activities which candidates must be able to do. Each qualification consists of:

- **elements of competence** — statements of what activities the candidate can actually do (sometimes called competencies or learning outcomes). Several of the elements on a similar topic are grouped together to form **units of competence**
- **range statements** — give details of where and in what circumstances the activities should be carried out
- **performance criteria** — give the standards of performance required for achievement of each element
- **knowledge specifications** — show what essential knowledge and understanding candidates need to underpin competent performance

- **evidence requirements** — list the types of evidence needed for satisfactory judgement of the candidate's competence in each element.

3.4.2 The key features of an NVQ

- The candidate can usually complete the qualification by carrying out their usual job in the workplace. Their performance is judged by an *internal assessor* and checked by an *internal verifier*. These could be their supervisors/trainers or external training providers, *eg* college lecturers. By 1995 internal assessors must be working towards a nationally recognised Assessor Award.
- NVQs are designed to be delivered and assessed in the workplace, not necessarily learned off the job, *eg* in a college or classroom. Some do take place in a realistic working environment (*eg* training workshop or college training restaurant).
- Assessment is not by external examination but the internal assessor uses a variety of methods including:
  - observation of the candidate in the workplace
  - candidates' products and assignments
  - oral questioning
  - written questions and/or tests set by the trainers
  - case studies, simulations and role play
  - a portfolio of evidence collected by each candidate.
- NVQs have no maximum or minimum time limit. Candidates can be allowed to achieve mastery of the skills over a period of time, perhaps with many attempts, rather than to pass or fail a once and for all test. Some candidates can be assessed immediately on their existing skills, or on skills acquired in other jobs or contexts. This is usually known as *accreditation of prior learning (APL).*
- *External verifiers* from the NVQ awarding body (*eg* City and Guilds), visit the workplace/college occasionally to monitor the assessment and the standards of work in relation to national standards.
- NVQs do not have grades such as A/B or credit/distinction, only pass or fail. **All** elements and units must be achieved to pass the qualification.
- NVQs will eventually be available at five levels but are not age-related, so any level can be taken at any time. All NVQs at level 3 include an aspect of supervising or managing other people, so candidates must be in a position to be able to carry this out in order to gain the qualification.

3.4.3 NVQs and employers

IES has carried out several research studies, for the DfEE and as part of the IES Corporate Research Programme, into the experiences of employers and employees in implementing NVQs[1]. The studies found that it was mainly large employers who were using NVQs but some small employers also did so. Many employers worry about the cost of introducing the qualifications, but this did not feature as a problem for those who had introduced them. The main difficulties cited were:

- the complexity of the structure and language of the qualification. This caused problems of understanding and delivery in the early stages of implementation.
- that some workplaces cannot provide training which covers all the statements of competence in NVQs. Simulated situations had to be set up or training providers/colleges used for some of the units of the qualification.
- there is concern about the rigour and consistency of assessment
- the selection and training of appropriate internal staff as assessors and verifiers is difficult for some employers
- there is a significant amount of time needed in the workplace for the collection of the portfolio and the assessment procedures.

However, there was support for NVQs from users at all levels and this centred around the role of the NVQ in raising standards of performance and morale. This is what both employers and employees liked:

- The statements of competence helped workers to appreciate the skills used in their jobs and to be clear what is expected of them. Some employers used them for staff development without entering all staff for the qualification.
- Both candidate and assessor were able to see clearly what the candidate actually has to achieve. As achievement progressed, so motivation of the candidate improved.
- The nature of the assessment was work based and especially the fact that employees did not have to be released to training at a college on a regular basis.
- The workplace supervisor's role as assessor formed an effective basis for them to monitor performance and

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[1] *National and Scottish Vocational Qualifications: Early indications of employers' take-up and use*, Callender C, Toye J, Connor H, Spilsbury M, IES Report 159, 1994; *Implementing NVQs: The experience of employers, employees and trainees*, Toye J, Vigor P, IMS Report 265, 1994; *Employers' use of the NVQ system*, Spilsbury M, Moralee J, Evans C, IES Report 293, 1995.

achievement, and it was generally felt that this led to an improvement in overall quality.

- There is national recognition for the qualification, and for those who want to progress, there is a clearer route within the qualifications framework.

The CBI report on NVQ implementation[1] also found that although there are problem areas which need to be addressed, many employers had found NVQs beneficial and were committed to their continued development.

Information about the qualifications and awarding bodies is available from NCVQ, but they also have a national database listing full details of all the NVQ standards, and the awarding bodies who offer them. This information is available on disk on a subscription basis, and is used by colleges, TECs and companies who need a variety of information which is updated regularly. NVQs also form the basis of the new Modern Apprenticeship programme. More details are given in Chapter 4.

3.5 General National Vocational Qualifications

3.5.1 Background

GNVQs were designed to be less job-specific than NVQs. They develop skills applicable to a broad occupational sector rather than one specific job and have a strong dimension of knowledge and understanding as well as skills. They are intended to provide preparation for employment as well as a route to higher education.

The three levels of GNVQ are Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced, the latter being described as a Vocational 'A' level (an Advanced GNVQ is equivalent to two 'A' level passes. More details on this are in Section 3.7).

GNVQs are now generally available or being piloted in the following occupational areas:

- Business
- Health and Social Care
- Leisure and Tourism
- Manufacturing
- Art and Design
- Construction and the Built Environment
- Hospitality and Catering

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[1] *Quality Assessed*, CBI, 1994.

- Science
- Engineering
- Information Technology.

3.5.2 The key features of a GNVQ

- A GNVQ is a made up of *units and elements of achievement, performance criteria, range statements, knowledge specifications and evidence indicators* which state exactly what the candidate should be able to do to be awarded the unit.
- GNVQ has three different types of unit which must be achieved to make up the whole qualification:

1. Mandatory vocational units	the same for everyone doing a qualification
2. Core skill units	
3. Optional vocational units	a choice of these

Additional units are other qualifications done in conjunction with a GNVQ, *eg* an additional 'A' level, GCSEs, NVQ units, or other GNVQ units. Additional units are not counted as part of a GNVQ qualification but can be recorded on a student's Record of Achievement. Bearing in mind that different awarding bodies can offer different Optional units, one example of a GNVQ is given in Figure 3.3.

- GNVQs have no maximum or minimum time limit but the Advanced GNVQ is usually delivered over two years and an Intermediate and Foundation over one year each.
- A GNVQ has examinations as well as continuous assessment of candidates' work. They must take an examination (GNVQ *test*) set and marked by the awarding body at the end of each mandatory unit, and achieve 70 per cent in each one. These tests can be attempted more than once and consist of mainly

Figure 3.3 Advanced GNVQ in Business

8 Mandatory Units:

Business in the economy
Business organisations and systems
Marketing
Human resources
Production and employment in the economy
Financial transactions, costing and pricing
Financial forecasting and monitoring
Business planning

4 Optional Vocational Units from:

Financial planning and monitoring
Business Law
Production
Business with Europe
Design
Financial services
Behaviour at work
Foreign language

3 Core Skill Units:

Communication/Information technology/Application of number

short questions. The tests are designed to test knowledge and understanding (*ie* what students **know**), to complement the continuous assessment which tests what students can **do**.

- Continuous assessment covers the written work which candidates produce but also spoken work, case studies and assignments. They collect a *portfolio of evidence* of achievement. Internal assessors continuously check their competence in the activities and the portfolio. Candidates have to pass all the elements of achievement in a unit in order to pass that unit.
- GNVQ grades are Pass, Distinction or Merit. All the elements and units in the GNVQ must be achieved to gain the Pass level qualification but only the work in the portfolio is graded.

3.5.3 GNVQ developments

NCVQ provisional figures for 1994/5 show almost 163,000 registrations for GNVQs, of which by far the largest number is in Business (55,000) followed by Health and Social Care (36,000) and Leisure and Tourism (30,000). A new subject being introduced in 1995/6 is Management Studies, with Retail and Distributive Services, and Media: Communication and Production available as pilots.

GNVQs have been designed for 16 year old school leavers, but adults also take them. Part 1 GNVQs in Business, Health and Social Care, and Manufacturing are being piloted for 14 to 16 year olds in schools alongside the National Curriculum and GCSEs. The aim of the NCVQ is to have GNVQs in at least two subjects available in more than 1,500 schools and colleges by 1996.

In 1995 approximately 10,500 Advanced GNVQ students applied to universities and colleges of art through the central admission systems, a tenfold increase on 1994. In 1994 1,500 advanced GNVQs were awarded and 60 per cent of these applied to higher education. Fifty one per cent received an offer of a place.[1] The GNVQs and Access to Higher Education (GATE) Project will follow up offers and places awarded to GNVQ students each year. The project also provides a database and publication listing universities' entrance requirements for GNVQ candidates.

The GNVQ core skills consist of:

- communication
- application of number
- information technology

which are mandatory, plus the optional skills of:

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[1] *Student Numbers Project Interim Report*, IES, 1995.

- working with others
- improving own learning and performance
- problem solving.

They are all available as units at five levels and are increasingly being used to add breadth to other qualifications. They have to be incorporated into Modern Apprenticeship programmes, and the mandatory core skills are part of the government's national targets for education and training (Section 4).

3.6 'A' and 'AS' levels

3.6.1 Key features of 'A' levels

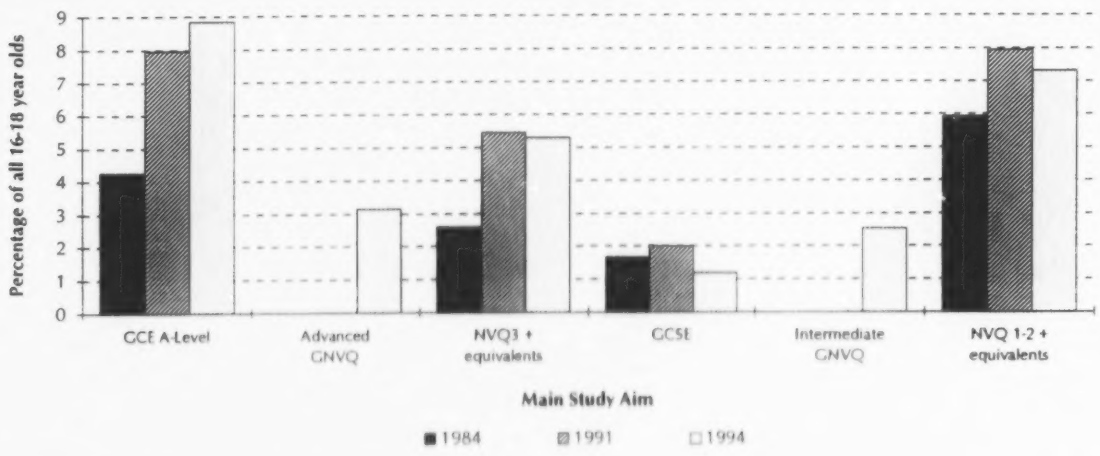
- 'A' levels do not have statements of competence showing what the student is able to do in the same way as NVQ and GNVQ. A syllabus and assessment objectives define what subjects and knowledge will be **taught,** not what the student can **do.**
- Assessment of 'A' levels is usually by several three-hour externally set and marked examinations which test samples of the syllabus, but not all of it. The papers test what students know and how to apply it, usually in written form. Some subjects have practical elements but the emphasis is on academic rather than vocational skills. Course work assessment in 'A' levels is limited to 20 per cent of the total marks for the majority of subjects.
- 'AS' levels were introduced in 1987 and demand 'A' level standard but take only half the time of an 'A' level so that a broader mix of subjects can be studied.
- Modular 'A' levels have been available for some time but these are now subject to a common set of principles. Credit can only be given for a whole 'A' level, not for separate modules.

3.7 Issues for recruitment

Figure 3.4 shows how the qualification aims of young people have changed over the last ten years and especially since 1991. There has been a rise in the numbers doing 'A' level and NVQs but a decline in GCSE numbers. GNVQs have been introduced only gradually but are proving very popular, and NCVQ is predicting that 25 per cent of the post-16 cohort will start a GNVQ in 1996.

This makes life more difficult for recruiters. At the lower levels they will have to differentiate between candidates with different types of qualifications. Selection at degree level will increasingly mean that they encounter people who have gone to university via a route other than 'A' levels.

Figure 3.4: Main study aims of 16-18 year olds in full-time education, FE sector, 1984 to 1994 (IES estimates)



Source: DfEE News, July 1995

An additional problem is that BTEC National qualifications have been allowed to co-exist outside the main qualifications framework. There was a lot of debate about which level was appropriate, and about the fact that they were unlike an NVQ or GNVQ in format. Because they have been popular over the last ten years, an agreement was finally reached by all the national bodies that they could remain in their present form.

It is not so easy for recruiters to compare directly the sort of achievement in GNVQ with 'A' level because of the very different types of courses and assessments. GNVQ is designed to be equivalent to two 'A' levels, grades A to E, but comparing GNVQ grades with 'A' level is not exact. The grades in GNVQ align with 'A' level grades as in Figure 3.5.

Because the vocational qualifications are relatively new, as well as complex, selection by written application, giving details of qualification and grades may be problematic for companies who

Figure 3.5: Corresponding levels and grades between GCE 'A' levels and Advanced GNVQs

One GNVQ Advanced Level	Two 'A' Levels
Distinction	A + A or
	A + B or
	B + B
Merit	C + C
Pass	D + D or
	D + E or
	E + E

Source: Review of 16-19 qualifications, Interim Report, July 1995

would normally recruit using 'A' level scores. However, if they revert to selection merely on the basis of GCSE and 'A' levels they might miss potential recruits who have gained a variety of experience and achievement through other qualifications.

3.8 Qualifications reform and review

3.8.1 'A' levels and GNVQs

Qualifications with the same title can vary widely in terms of syllabus and assessment system, depending on the awarding body chosen by the school or college. However, in the last two years there have been moves through NCVQ and SCAA to standardise the content of qualifications to some extent, in 'A' levels and GNVQs.

- 'A' level 'cores' are gradually being developed with the aim of providing a degree of commonality between all 'A' level syllabuses regardless of awarding body.
- GNVQs have *mandatory* units which means that two thirds of the total in each subject are common across all awarding bodies.

3.8.2 The Dearing Review

In April 1995 Sir Ron Dearing was invited by the Secretaries of State for Education and Employment to consider ways to strengthen, consolidate and improve the framework of qualifications for 16 to 19 year olds. After wide consultation, an interim report was published in July 1995. Some of its main proposals are concerned with:

- maintaining the rigour of 'A' levels
- building on the development of GNVQ/NVQs
- increasing participation and achievement
- preparing young people for work and HE
- achieving greater coherence of qualifications
- securing maximum value for money
- user friendliness of qualifications.

The final report and recommendations will be published in 1996.

3.8.3 Review of vocational qualifications

The 'Top 100 NVQs' *ie* the most used qualifications, are being reviewed by the Evaluation Advisory Group under the chairmanship of Gordon Beaumont, the former chair of the CBI's Training Committee. Contributions have been invited from all

sectors of employment and training who use NVQs, and the report was published in January 1996. New GNVQs are being developed and piloted and a reviews of assessment and quality are under way.

4. Recent Developments and the Future

The recent White Papers[1] contain measures to encourage higher levels of skill in both young people and the existing workforce. These measures will need to be supported and encouraged by both employers and further education colleges if the numbers set out in the targets are to be achieved.

4.1 Training

There are national measures to support vocational training, some of which are designed for individuals, whilst others offer funding for employers who train existing employees or new recruits. Details are available from TECs or the Employment Service, and the major recent developments include the following:

- Modern Apprenticeships are designed to offer a work-based programme which will include a level 3 NVQ plus core skills and other appropriate training. They are aimed at 16 to 17 year old school leavers and cover many new occupational areas such as health care, retailing, IT, as well as traditional ones such as steel and engineering. Employers are expected to meet wage and on-the-job training costs, and the government contributes to off-the-job training costs. Accelerated Modern Apprenticeships are offered to employed 18 to 19 year olds who already have 'A' levels or Advanced GNVQs. The Industry Training Organisations (ITOs) have devised the apprenticeship programmes for each sector, and they are administered locally by TECs.
- Youth Credits (formerly Training Credits) of a set value are given to individual young people to buy training from any provider of their choice. All 16 to 17 year olds are now offered these to obtain Youth Training or Modern Apprenticeships.
- Career Development Loans are subsidised unsecured loans available to individuals through specific banks to pay for vocational courses. Applicants can be employed or unemployed and can borrow between £200 and £8,000. Between 1988 and 1994, 40,000 people had taken out loans.

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[1] *Competitiveness: Helping Business to Win*, HMSO, 1994; *Competitiveness: Forging Ahead*, HMSO, 1995.

- Vocational tax relief of 25 per cent is available on the cost of fees to individuals who are paying their own course fees, for training leading to all or part of an NVQ or GNVQ.
- Firms with 50 employees or fewer are eligible for funding to update existing staff. A fund of £63 million is available until 1997/8 and the target is 24,000 key workers to be trained to level 3 NVQ and Trainer/Assessor skills. Funds are given to TECs to manage locally. New small firms training loans are planned to help 30,000 people by 1997/8.

4.2 Employer/education links

The more traditional links between colleges and employers through day-release training may now be declining, but new types of links are being created to meet the changing needs of employers and of industry as a whole. The main developments which will lead to these changing relationships between FE and employers can be summarised:

- Colleges and local labour markets are being brought closer together because FE college strategic plans, which are currently submitted to the Funding Councils, also have to be approved by TECs to ensure that they are meeting local labour market requirements. TECs are also operating a new 'Competitiveness Fund' of about £20 million established for state of the art equipment and buildings in areas of critical labour market needs.
- The Investors in People initiative has encouraged and supported employers in developing and training their staff. IES work on college–employer interaction (IES, 1995) showed that IiP had encouraged some companies to use FE colleges for employee training. 1,200 organisations have achieved IiP recognition so far and another 12,400 have committed themselves to it[1]. Large firms which have already achieved IiP are encouraged to offer training advisers to small supplier firms to help them to introduce IiP in their own workplace.
- The Charter for Further Education was published in September 1993 and lays down standards of service which employers as well as students and the community can expect from FE colleges. Colleges have to provide their own individual charters and are required to carry out an annual survey of customers, including employers, and publish a summary of the survey. They also have to publish their examination results and student destinations. They have to provide employers with full details of any courses which their employees are following, and reports of progress.
- As well as the FE Charter, colleges have quality management processes which are monitored by inspectors from the FEFC.

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[1] *Evaluation of Investors in People in England and Wales, 1994-1995*, IES.

Many colleges have also gone through the process of achieving BS5750, especially if they are training providers for employers or TECs. The British Standard is not generally considered to be suited to educational requirements and other colleges are moving towards Investors in People status because they feel that this fits better with their ethos as training organisations.

4.3 National Targets for Education and Training

A key element of the government's education and training strategy are the National Targets for Education and Training (NTETs) Figure 4.1. These not only set foundation targets for young people's achievement in vocational as well as academic qualifications, but 'lifetime targets' for the national workforce.

The further education sector is in a period of growth and change which stem from its important role in the economic well-being of the country. It will continue to be the key to the vocational training and education of large numbers of people and to meeting the government's targets. Participation in post-compulsory education is high but it must lead to the right sort of skills and knowledge for future employment.

Partnerships between all those involved in these developments will, it is hoped, lead to further increases in participation, standards and attainment at all levels, and to a climate where education and training are seen as the norm in everyday life and work.

Figure 4.1 National Targets for Education and Training, by 2000

Foundation Learning

1. By age 19, 85 per cent of young people to achieve five GCSEs at Grade C or above, an Intermediate GNVQ or an NVQ level 2.

2. 75 per cent of young people to achieve level 2 competence in communication, numeracy and IT by age 19; and 35 per cent to achieve level 3 competence in these core skills by age 21.

3. By age 21, 60 per cent of young people to achieve 2 GCE 'A' levels, an Advanced GNVQ or an NVQ level 3.

Lifetime Learning

1. 60 per cent of the workforce to be qualified to NVQ level 3, Advanced GNVQ or 2 GCE 'A' level standard.

2. 30 per cent of the workforce to have a vocational, professional, management or academic qualification at NVQ level 4 or above.

3. 70 per cent of all organisations employing 200 or more employees, and 35 per cent of those employing 50 or more, to be recognised as Investors in People.

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FURTHER EDUCATION: AN EMPLOYER'S FACTFILE
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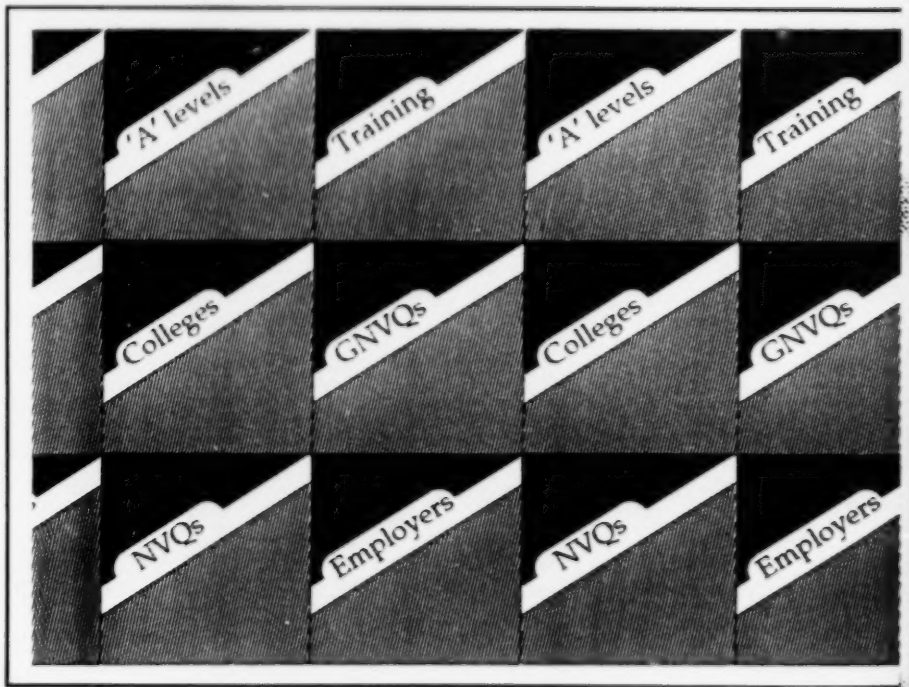
This IES brief for employers has been produced under the auspices of the IES Co-operative Research Programme. It provides companies with some key facts about the further education sector and its increasingly important role in recruitment, training and career development. It also outlines the substantial changes that are taking place in the development and delivery of qualifications.



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